

Phoenix Thriving

Conquering Stress and Burnout
in the Blogging Life



Cate Russell-Cole

Phoenix Thriving: Conquering Stress and Burnout in the Blogging Life

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Introduction

I read so many disheartening messages and blog posts from burnt out and stressed bloggers, that I have been writing articles to equip, empower and encourage them. This book was created to help ease the burden of writing, marketing, social media and the annoyances that fly in the faces of online writers.

The first Phoenix book, *Phoenix Rising: Conquering the Stresses of the Writer's Life*, was never intended to be a series, but as the need to support writers has become so great, it has become one. I chose the image and title of the phoenix rising from the ashes in response to the battles writers face. I personally relate to the need to choose to rise upwards: away from the fire and into a clear sky to start again. If your creative energy is low, your word count flagging or the downsides of being a writer are taking away your joy, I hope this book will give you new strength and hope with which to spread your wings and find new freedom.

If you would like a copy of the first book, it is available from Amazon Kindle.

Please note that this is an Australian book: thus the spelling adheres to Australian norms and standards.

Book One: *Phoenix Rising: Conquering the Stresses of the Writer's Life* Chapters:

- Measuring the Value of Your Work in a Digital Age
- Healing Creative Injuries
- Creative Dark Matter: Clear Out What's Holding You Down
- Bomb Proofing Your Writer's Ego
- Handling Criticism
- Moving Ahead in Small Steps: Why Revolutions Rarely Work
- Fat Free, Guilt Free Blogging Goals
- Escaping Mental Quicksand: Your "Time of Readiness"
- Is Your Writing Life Stuck Under Your Mouse?
- Balancing the Blogging Load
- Writers and Depression: Debunking the Stereotypes
- Writers Should Be Bathed in Blue: Boosting Your Productivity
- Which Wins? Creative Pleasure or Word Count?
- Petwification: A Health Warning for All Writers

Stubbornness: the Writer's Super Power

You never hear the word stubborn used in a positive context; however, without it, you are sunk as a writer. It is one of those character traits that gets constant bad press, but is essential to survival in any tough situation.

Thesaurus.com lists stubborn this way: "adamant, bullheaded, determined, firm, fixed, hardheaded, headstrong, inflexible, intractable, obstinate, opinionated, persevering, persistent, relentless, rigid, self-willed, single-minded, steadfast, tenacious, tough, unbending, unshakable, wilful."

Ouch! It's the same as saying that 'stubborn' is made up of two four-letter words, strung together to create an obscenity. However, look at the gems that are in there: determined, persistent, steadfast, persevering. Plus in the face of trolls, cynicism, rejections and opinionated reviews, isn't it better to be firm, fixed, single-minded and tenacious? Those are qualities which will stop you from abandoning your goals or giving in to those who have no right to a final say on your value.

Being too rigid and bullheaded may not be a character asset in every aspect of life, when used to empower your creative work, being obstinate can certainly have its benefits. So if you have a stubborn streak, when the road to success gets rough, wear it proudly. It will get you where complacent, compliant and yielding can never take you.

Creative Myth-Busting: Are You Left Brained Or Right Brained?

Have you done tests to determine which side of your brain is the most dominant? Do you tend towards the more creative right or the more analytical left hemisphere? How does this affect what you think you can and you can't do?

The left brain - right brain theory has had a lot of attention from creativity teachers and enthusiasts. There are plenty of tests available to help you work out which side of your brain is the most dominant and how you can manage that dominance to pursue your goals. However, further research has shown that the theory is not sound. With the latest medical imaging, we have learnt that the human brain is much more complex than anticipated. The left brain - right brain theory is just that, a theory and an outdated one.

If you are a keen follower of the left - right theory, this may sound a little disappointing, or even wrong. However, it is actually very good news. It means you are not locked into thinking only one way. If you are analytical, you can still work towards being more creative and your biology won't stand in your way! If you are a less structured, creative person, you can also hone your analytical skills more. How we are wired to think depends much more on the areas of ourselves we place the value and focus on. If you tell yourself you cannot do something, you will prove yourself right! We all have skills we are good at and others we struggle with, but your biology isn't the final determinant of what you can achieve. Your self perception can be far more dominant than your grey matter. Change your 'cannot' thinking to 'can work at it' and you may be surprised at what you can do...

Here is a little more information on why the left brain - right brain theory has been disproved. People with brain injuries from accidents, or who have had surgery to split their brain into two separate hemispheres, have been found to be able to regain functions they should not have recovered if the theory is correct. Functions such as speech and writing can be controlled from both sides of the brain. It isn't necessarily just a matter of damaged brains relearning skills in another part either. With MRI scanning, researchers have now shown that musicians brains light up in multiple places when they play. Different parts of the brain are stimulated to pull together the whole process of playing and appreciating music. If only one side dominated, then a musician's right hemisphere would be the only side that lit up.

The physiology of how the brain processes information is extremely complex and by no means, completely understood. Everyone's brain makes it's own connections as they grow and learn. There are no set pathways which are the same for everyone. At one stage scientists thought that the brain stopped making connections at a certain age, therefore, if you had an illness or injury that damaged your memory or a body function, you couldn't recover. Now they know it is not true. Our brain is plastic, adaptable and makes new connections right throughout life. The brain is like a muscle which needs exercising. Basic mental exercises, such as doing a crossword puzzle daily, help keep us sharp. Memory improves, our enjoyment of life is greater and there is even evidence that diseases such as dementia can be delayed a little by keeping mentally active.

The great value the left brain - right brain theory does have, is it makes us aware of using all our capability. It is easy to become locked into habit and not explore areas we have taught ourselves to believe we are incapable of. So challenge your perception of what you can and can't do! Never let the word 'impossible' get in the way.

Get a Theme Song, it Will Get You Moving!

Is this a nutty flashback to Ally McBeal, or is there gain to be had by using a piece of music to get motivated? If you've ever felt like taking on the world after listening to inspirational lyrics, then you know, it's the latter... plus it's biology!

According to Mark Fenske, an associate professor in Neuroscience at the University of Guelph, music is such a driving motivator, that at times, athletes have been banned from using it, as it can maximise their endurance and performance. So you don't see competing runners not wearing iPods because cords are a tripping hazard! Music reacts with our nervous system, accelerating heart rate, affecting our muscular coordination and getting us ready to go!

Some of the greatest anthems I have loved over time include "All Fired Up" from Pat Benatar; "Living On A Prayer" by Bon Jovi, "A Question of Honour" by Sarah Brightman and "Undefeated" by Def Leppard. I could go on and on about all the songs that have significant memories and lyrics for me. I can't do without music in my life.

The Internet, Respect and a Fair Go for All Writers

At times the Internet has left me feeling like I am on the crazy train. I've dealt with inane and unnecessary obscenities, being force-fed gay porn (don't ask), people who are leaving comments editing other people's comments... yup... and that is the start!

I don't know any blogger or writer who doesn't work their butt off trying to churn out quality material, that includes myself. The trouble is, it doesn't matter what you do, what your intentions or how careful you are, you get attacked.

May I suggest a calming solution? If you do not like a status / tweet / blog post / book or web site, do what you would do in a restaurant: skip over it to something you do like. Don't start a celebrity chef brawl. How many of you go out to dinner and then go into the kitchen to tell off the chef, as you don't like duck? None? OK, so why do we do it to each other online, publicly, in a manner that hurts people and destroys reputations?

If you don't like an outfit while shopping, you pass over it on the hanger and get something else. If you don't like a book in the book shop, you put it down and browse elsewhere. The same behaviour here would bless people out of their socks! I am weary of nurturing writers through cruel reviews and judgemental attacks. If you hate it, don't go back... or unfollow or just move onto something else. Please don't try to force someone into your way of thinking. You would hate it done to you.

There are billions of people on this planet; there should be multiple opinions, it makes the world a greater place. However, we struggle with being able to tolerate anyone who thinks differently. Human nature has this obsession with wanting to herd everyone into line, like sheep dogs. Please, stifle the temptation to point out a minor editing issue, dislike of someone's book cover / taste in music / religious views / weird blog post topic / hot issue / obsession with cute bunny photos... just let it be.

Paul McCartney's mother, Mary, had it right. Remember this song? This is slightly out of context, but the advice still applies. "Let it be, let it be. Let it be, let it be. Yeah there will be an answer, let it be. Let it be, let it be. Let it be, let it be. Whisper words of wisdom, let it be."

Just let it go. You will be less stressed. You will feel good about yourself. Live and let live. It's not worth a life of conflict where you burn your bridges and guaranteed, someone will go after your neck in return.

Pay Yourself First

“Pay yourself first,” was the solid advice I was given with business book keeping: and face it, business book keeping: and face it, writing is a business, even if you work at it recreationally. If the IRS wants a share, it’s not necessarily a carefree hobby any longer...

It is not the size of my royalty cheques that keep me writing. Please, hold my hand while I tell you the story of banking my very first ever royalty cheque from the almighty Amazon. A Hallmark, Kodak, landmark moment! (Not quite...)

I was tired. I had another headache. I had my husband double-check the numbers on the stub to ensure Amazon got it right before I banked it. Then I had a frustrating twenty minute wait while a very young customer service representative with chipped nail polish, unkempt hair and no sense of organisation, danced around to the tune on the piped music and ran from desk to desk, attempting to work out what to do with an international cheque. (Yes, professionalism is dead.)

The grand prize for this? 70% culled off my takings as I am in Australia, not the States; plus another 5% taken off by the United States Internal Revenue Service (though it was worth the four month fight with Amazon, or that would have been 30%); \$7 lost in the exchange rate and the standard \$15 international cheque lodgement fee. I looked at the receipt and saw how little of the amount I got to keep and wanted to cry. I make more money selling a handful of writing course CD-Roms, than I did from pushing 1500 books. I went to text my long- suffering husband for comfort... to find my phone battery had run out!

Pay yourself first. Pay myself with what? If I made 5c an hour for all the work I had put into writing, editing, formatting and promoting those books, I’d still be solidly in the red. I know that the amount adds up over time and makes it worthwhile... but on a first cheque, which I should have been excited about, it stunk!

So how do you pay yourself first when the money isn’t there? You do it by placing value on what you do and how it makes you feel about yourself. This is one instance when looking for outside approval is not going to do anything to encourage you. You pay yourself in personal satisfaction. I wrote those books, which I thought I’d never have the time to do. Other work and lack of courage had always gotten in the way of becoming a published author. In overcoming those hurdles, I have achieved a dream.

When I look back, it has never been money or recognition that has motivated me to write. I started writing when I was all of nine and my sister bought me a diary. I have been hooked on getting my thoughts down ever since. These days, I just share it with other people. One day I will probably say “enough” to business and will exchange my keyboard for my bunny slippers and Star Trek re-runs. Even then, I will always find the time to write.

Writing has to be for me first. It has to be what I want to do. It has to be its own reward. Chasing financial success works for a very few, but being true to yourself works for all.

Getting Real About Writer's Burn Out and Social Media Demands

I was going through my Triberr stream today and someone had blogged on people who are too "big for their britches" to say thank you for retweets, comments etc. I shared the post as they do have a point. However, there can more behind this issue than mere rude behaviour: it may be overwhelm and silently suffering burn out.

Lack of response can come down to time availability, overload, required response numbers... and the need for a balanced life which includes family, recreation and rest. Those of us who have the sense to balance our time, or step away from "must-do to succeed" tasks, can pay a price in public criticism and the god called search engine rankings. It's time for technology and all writers to stop cracking the whip and set better standards. Our online culture needs to allow people to lead balanced lives! We are creating our own hell... but we can create a way out of it, by changing our expectations and what we pressure other writers to do.

As my blog and business have grown, I have had increasing issues with time. I cannot comment on all the visited blog posts I would dearly love to respond to, which makes me feel very guilty. Thanks to Triberr, I have more RTs than I can keep up with. Add on the demands of marketing, networking, supporting other writers, time for writing, home life, book keeping, bills, health challenges and the many, many social media must-dos which I am supposed to follow... it all becomes physically and mentally impossible to keep up with.

For the last few years, I have worked my butt off trying to do it all the right way and it has slowly and surely led to me balancing on the edge of total burn out. So I chosen to step back from much of my prior workload for a time. Does that mean you will judge me as "too big for my britches," as I need to switch comments off for a time, or because I am not on Twitter saying thanks every day?

I see so many writers say every week. "I am out of ideas." "I want forget all the social media: I am forcing myself, as I am told I have to." "My book isn't working any more, I am going to ditch it. I don't know what to do." Guess what, like me, you're over-tired. If you're stats are low on blog visits or followers, maybe your content is bad as you're too tired to think straight and good ideas have stopped flowing. If you're stuck on a plot problem, maybe you need to let your mental muscles rest and regenerate.

Technically burn out is: "the condition of someone who has become very physically and emotionally tired after doing a difficult job for a long time." There is a fallacy that if you are doing what you love, you can't burn out. Yes, you can. Burn out advances faster when you feel trapped, stuck, frustrated or are doing a task you don't enjoy: but it can still quietly sneak up on you when you are doing what you love. It comes from being out of balance.

It comes from not getting away from your desk and taking "you" time; from giving into the online peer pressure to be so involved in everything, you are too busy for your creative brain to rest and for your stress level to reduce. Long term, those two don't just lead to writer's block, increased stress hormones will make your body sick. If you over-rev a car, the motor will burn out. We are no different.

There is an answer: rest, reduce your workload and balance out your time.

According to SEO and all the good advice on success, this is suicide. According to Jeff Goins and his Slow Down Challenge, it is wisdom. For me, it is necessity. I am going to stop and quietly repair.

I challenge you to join me in re-assessing what you're doing:

- Look at your stats and see what social media/promotion doesn't work, and have the courage to radically reduce your time on it, or stop using it.
- Limit the number of days a week you post so you don't run out of ideas, energy or overload your audience.
- Get out of Facebook and Google communities and groups that are unresponsive, spam attractors or criticism ridden.
- Stay away from Blogging challenges that are demanding more than 3-4 posts a week, or modify your involvement to what you can handle without stress, regardless of the rules. (I like to do them in my own time, for me, when I am ready.)
- If you know NaNoWriMo and challenges like it are unrealistic and will scorch your sanity and stress you, don't do it! Give yourself a longer time frame.
- Reduce word counts to a level you know you can achieve and be patience. Just because it takes longer to get there, doesn't mean you won't!
- Reduce extensive goal lists to the most important and work on no more than three at a time.
- Stop being a type A and enjoy your family, friends, fresh air, fun and the good parts of life which involve no computer connection.

Take very good care of yourself.

Surviving Blogging and Writing Challenges: Wise Choices

The aim of my blog is to equip, encourage and empower writers. I pass on as many resources as I can, including writing and blogging challenges which appear sound.

We have NaNoWriMo, OctPoWriMo, NaPoWriMo, JuNoWriMo, Camp NaNoWriMo, the Wego Health Bloggers Challenge, the A-Z Blogging Challenge, Story A Day, Script Frenzy, NaPoBloMo, ROW80, NaNoEdMo, Story of my Life Blogathon, Word Count Blogathon, Creative Every Day, #writemotivation, Blog Blitz, Write Non-Fiction in November, more Wego Blogging initiatives, commercial authors such as Jeff Goins have their own... and each time I look at Twitter there are more!

There is something for everyone and that's not a bad thing... however... exhaustion and creative burnout beckons: the time requirements are absolutely deadly on some of those challenges. When considering getting involved in these challenges, don't follow the crowd. Please ask yourself:

- What are my time, family and energy constraints?
- Is it flexible enough to encompass the goals I need to work on.
- Is the "encouragement" given in this challenge cracking the whip too hard, making me feel pressured or guilty?
- Is the stated time period without rest days? (This is deadly to your mental and physical health: ask any counsellor, psychologist or balanced life coach.)
- Will this take me away from my work in progress which is my top priority?
- Will this actually increase my skill as a writer? Am I just ticking a box that I blogged?
- Will this make me feel good or bad at the end, as I aced it or failed miserably?
- Can I take the inspiration and do my own version, at my own pace?
- Are the social requirements too much or too tempting as a distraction?
- Will the time it takes to read other's posts and check-in be too much time away from what I actually need to be doing?
- If you are not feeling motivated to write, are you using this challenge as a crutch to get motivated? If so, don't use the challenge as a magical remedy to put you on track. It won't. Especially if your issue is lack of confidence, time shortages or exhaustion.
- Am I relying on other's around me in challenges for affirmation, rather than working on my own self-esteem as a writer?

Sometimes when we feel exhausted as writers, it is because we simply need a break to re-charge our batteries. Like any body part, your mind needs rest. If you over-use any muscle in your body, it will become strained, painful and you won't be able to work. If you are simply over it, maybe the best remedy is time-out before you burn out. Don't get to the point where you go months without writing again.

SEO and Social Media Survival

There are many bloggers out there who still don't know what SEO is. That is and isn't a good thing. SEO is Search Engine Optimisation and for best practice, it is supposed to have a very large say in how you write book titles, web pages and blog posts. You should use the correct keywords to get higher search engine rankings. A great idea? Yes, if you want to stop writing as yourself and be told what to do by a robot. Think about it...

While SEO is needed to an extent, using keywords for blog posts can also assist you with better SEO rankings. Plus I guarantee you, it doesn't matter how good you are at SEO, you will still get blog comments in your spam folder, telling you to use their service to get better results. They are robotic mass dumped comments... all computer injected. It is big business and it wants to tell you what to do, how to write and what you write. That is an anathema to my creative soul!

I said robots again, didn't I? To a degree the old sci-fi writers were correct: we are being controlled by them. They just don't clean our houses yet. They scrub our brains instead.

Digital computations determine how easy it is for us to have our books found on Amazon, our Page posts read on Facebook, our web site or blog found on Google... They are awfully frustrating and if you want to claw your way to the top of the pile, you have to work - hard! You must sprinkle your keywords through your post, use meta tags on web pages, sprinkle matching keywords through your web pages, tweet, status update, Like, Plus 1, retweet, share and comment until your fingers fall off and your brain goes numb.

I did this assiduously and simply burnt out! I wasn't tired of blogging, writing and people. It was those robotic demands that did me in. So I spent far less time on Facebook, Twitter and Google Plus. Yesterday, after reading a massive, endless stream of SEO and social media how-to posts, I came to the conclusion that as writers, we are possibly far better off writing in the attic, away from the computer and all this "wonderfully good advice."

Any available time I have in my week, is spent assuaging the gods of rank. So I quit! I've noticed that since I began to pull back in September, my visit stats and book sales didn't actually change much.

So here is how I intend to survive online from here on. I hope it inspires you.

- I will automate as many blog posts and shares as I can, so I can take time to see the sunshine and not be spending hours manually on social media. "I'm sorry Hal, I'm afraid I can't do that."
- I will not read any more SEO and social media how-to posts or books: instead I will be myself and stay tapped into my innate creativity identity.
- I am using all social media, including Facebook, for business only.
- I won't join groups and communities I cannot keep up with, just because they are "must-do."
- I will not get trapped in worrying about my statistics. If I get 2 Likes on a post and someone was inspired: I aced it! That is my main goal: encourage, equip, empower. Not rack up fat numbers.
- I will write the blog posts which are close to my heart, regardless of what posts pull in the greatest number of readers.

It sounds like mutiny. I am reading more and more about people shutting down blogs and killing off their social media accounts. In business, if something does not pull in sales, you stop doing it. Yet online, many of us tend to jump feet first into the latest and greatest next thing, perhaps in the hope it will propel us to stardom? That doesn't work. It simply chews away more of our time and sanity.

It is all about sanity. If I have to mutiny against binary calculations, the numbers game and everyone's marvellous advice, then I will. Join me... your creative soul is worth more than this.

Writing Toxins: Optimising A Fully Functioning Mind

Like all writers, I have days where I just can't get work done. I have goals, deadlines and a schedule I try and follow, but it can be easier to plan than to write. If I have failed to nurture my mental energy, I just want to fall asleep on my keyboard, achieving nothing. One of the biggest source of this problem comes from the mind - body connection we all have. Brains need fuel. The most critical components are oxygen and sleep.

We have heard it all before... but it is true. You can't think if you're:

- tired,
- dehydrated,
- living on junk food,
- drunk,
- drugged (including the damage done by smoking which starves the body of O2),
- getting by on caffeine,
- or haven't moved from your chair for a long stretch.

Sitting at a desk for hours can be as toxic as living on fast food. It is not just your eyes that need a break from the computer screen. You need to get up and move around periodically so that oxygen gets pushed through your body tissues and is able to refresh and power your brain.

The other great killer, depending on whether you see it as empowering or damaging, is stress. Long term stress and the conviction it will damage you, can harm to your body and your creative mind. Any time we are out of balance, we risk damaging our physical health and our creative minds. I see writers who work all day, rush home to care for families and then stay up late at night writing.

I understand time constraints, however, when you push yourself to do too much on a continual basis, you will run dry both physically and mentally. Ideas will not come; ability to see mistakes when editing will go astray and you will start to feel like a failure.

So take a deep breath; be realistic and work out how to take care of yourself properly. If you aren't taking care of you, then you won't be caring for your writing. The body and mind go hand in hand. Love them both.

Is Your Blog Trapping You or Helping You Fly? A Summary of the Arguments

I've been looking at this debate for some time, as I see more and more bloggers talking of burnout and writers starting to rebel against the endless demands of what you must do to succeed! To settle the matter, I took a few hours out to read and properly absorb both sides of the argument. It is complex when it comes to the publishing industry. At the end, all I could do was make up my own mind about what was right for me. I have placed as many of the arguments here as I can so you can also make up *your own mind*. Don't follow the herd: do what works for you!

Why Not to Blog:

- It is a huge, dark, swirling time vortex that will suck you in and eat you alive: IF you over-do it (blogging nearly every day). You will run out of ideas and creative energy.
- Jeff Goins made an excellent point about blogging being a form of instant self-gratification and positive feedback. If you blog to get comments and cyber hugs, rather than to follow your own individual creative journey, you are not doing yourself any favours.
- The more you blog, the less of your book/s you write.
- Placing your personal experiences online is a risk: everyone now knows about your negative traits and struggles if they should search for you, which now they do. For example, if you are a writer who has hassles with self-discipline and editing, you've just publicly announced that to future followers, publishers and other important contacts.
- As blogging is so easy and fast, quality can suffer. If you don't take the time to write properly, a blog will do you more harm than good.
- There are huge debates on whether blogging a book and then selling it is a good idea or not.
- Some argue that blogging to market your work does not sell more books. Some say it does.
- Some publishers tell you not to blog, it is a useless act. Some tell you to have one before you approach a publisher as they want a ready-made audience. Do what you want.
- Promotion on social media, writing and chasing down lost guest posts etc. chews up more time than it is worth investing: unless you have a massive audience backed up by concrete product/book sales that justify it. If you're that big as an author, then do you need a blog anyway?
- Monetizing just to make it worth the time, following trends to get followers, rehashing current topics rather than thinking about what you want to write, or mindlessly adopting cover reveals, blog hops and book tours just to fill space, will murder your individuality and teach you to be an automaton rather than an innovator and leader.

Why Blogging is Great

- You are writing: whether or not it is for your work in progress or not, you are building skills.
- You are building contacts through readers, followers etc. which can be of great value in the long run in many ways: economic, personal and emotional.
- You have the chance to explore book ideas and gain valuable feedback.

- If you just love doing it, then do it! Forget the statistics, if it's rewarding for you as a writer, go for it!
- Used the right way, blogging can assist in book sales: as long as you're using multiple sales strategies and not relying on your blog alone.
- Blogging a book first and then publishing it can work: you can capture a different audience. However, consider taking those posts offline long before you sell your book, or shorten them to teasers with links to your new book.
- Gaining support and feedback through your blog can be very helpful to writers, particularly as we tend to be introverts working on a lonely craft.
- If you have a specific purpose for your blog (such as sharing resources for writers); don't write more than you can cope with; and your following is steadily building, then blogging is an author/business building strategy you cannot do without.

When You Should Definitely Stop and Rethink Blogging

- When you find yourself filling in posts with anything, as you just want it done and are tired, drained and over it!
- Having no direction: which is sometimes apparent in writers with multiple blogs, unless they are for multiple purposes... but watch how much time that takes up!
- Letting your self-esteem be dictated by reader statistics.
- If it is an excuse for social media interaction which may be a sign you need to find a better answer to loneliness, or other tasks you are avoiding.
- When you are investing too much time, and other higher priority tasks are going begging as a result.
- Getting involved in blog challenges which run you into the ground with time demands and leave you wrecked.
- When you have made such a hash of a blog that is screams lack of quality, poor commitment to your writing, or stands as testimony to an attitude that makes you cringe!
- When your content is too personal and can do you damage in the future with potential relationships, employers or contacts in publishing and promotion.
- Taking on guest bloggers, cover reveals and other sharing initiatives where you are used and not supported or thanked.
- When the amount of effort invested is not getting you the results you need long term. If you are losing followers, not growing and this has been going on for at least six months, maybe it's just not the medium for you...

... and you know something? That's alright: you don't H.A.V.E. to be a blogger. Do what is right for you. Write what you have in your heart and be true to yourself. Follower numbers aren't everything.

Grabbing a Willing Audience: Ingenuity in Action!

Throughout our modern Internet history, there have been a few initiatives which have really stood out to me as audacious achievers. One of these is most definitely Klout.

I stayed away from Klout for a long time as I didn't see the value in it, plus frankly, the last thing I needed was another commitment. I'm trying to run a business, a home and a tricky health situation. I put priority on knowing when to draw the line.

Then one day, someone very kindly gave me some Klout. I was touched, I thought it was a lovely gesture. However, knowing I had never signed up for Klout, I also considered that to be downright suspicious. The Internet is not always a safe place to be... In the interests of knowing my potential enemy, I signed up. It seemed OK. I linked up my networks, got a score and it all seemed kind of nice. I started giving Klout to people and that gave me a warm, fuzzy feeling of giving back. It was goodwill in digital form.

Harmless enough, or as they say on the Cheezburger network, "seems legit." But it worries me. Klout is a clever marketing technique. It is most certainly not a self-sacrificing users service. I am seeing far, far too many writers measuring their self-esteem on their Klout score and worrying about it. After all, it's the "Standard for Influence." That is disturbing. We've walked straight into their business plan and people are being negatively affected.

Writers need to be enjoying their creative journey; not bemoaning their perceived low score, or worrying about how to boost it higher. Considering it only measures half the networks I am attached to and doesn't accurately reflect all activity on those, it's pretty worthless to me anyway. I still occasionally log in and give some Klout to show my goodwill to people. That's about it folks! I've dropped six points as I dared to work less hours and have some annual leave. I couldn't care less. It doesn't really matter.

Interestingly, the brand name Klout comes from the word "clout, noun: authoritative power, authority, controlling power, directing power, dominancy, dominion, eminence, force, hegemony, importance, influentiaity, leverage, mastership, notability, power, power of impelling, predominancy, prestige, prominence, puissance, significance, weight." (Source: <http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/clout>)

Whoa! Now pulling in that word as your business name was a great move. Talk about building a strong image. That's a master stroke in business and not easy to do.

May I challenge you to think about this a little further?

Don't forget here that Klout came looking for me and registered details about me, without my consent. (See Red Flags below for their policy statements.) When you deal with mail harvesting robots, or unsolicited marketing on social media, you get annoyed and look for an off option.

So why do we consider Klout to be benevolent? Because it makes us feel good when we see words like "you influence" and our score rises. As friends contribute, it appears to be a sweetheart service. However, I can click on any of the people I influence, select anyone they influence (whether I know them or not), and give them Klout then brag about it on Twitter – which may also increase my

Twitter following as I was nice to someone and they just “discovered me.” Awwwww. How genuinely sweet is that? It’s not. It’s manipulation to get attention.

I think it’s great to give people positive feedback, especially through retweets, blog comments and shares. I have a large problem with doing it through a commercial service with investors, that gives you bragging rights and takes any of your information off the net without your permission. I don’t care if they call it public information or not, I didn’t give them a right to it and that to me personally, ranks the same as spam.

I have no issues with online enterprises making money to cover costs, but when it’s a business affecting people’s self worth (regardless of the fact it is our individual responsibility not to allow anyone to affect us), then I get somewhat riled up.

Don’t let it run your self esteem!

Red Flags

“Klout collects public data in order to accurately measure influence. Users can control the data available to Klout by changing the privacy settings on individual networks. Klout will never access your private data unless we have explicit permission.”

All my privacy settings are already set to keep intruders out, so how does this work? As far as I am concerned, they should never have known about me, let alone scored me. I came in with a score of 41 and I had never used their service or given any permissions. They had to collect that without my consent somehow.

“Allow Klout to see which pages you like on Facebook. This will allow Klout to offer you better and more relevant perks, communications, and experiences!” I have a high distinction in marketing. I have worked with small businesses on marketing strategies since the early nineties. To attract investors and get people in the door, this is a really good move. These guys are smart! I meant it when I used the word ingenuity. They have it.

Just in case I haven’t convinced you yet that you’re not a money making opportunity: the perk providers undoubtably pay and in the terms and conditions for all of us: “To the extent the Service or any portion thereof is made available for any fee, you may be required to select a payment plan and provide Klout information regarding your credit card or other payment instrument. You represent and warrant to Klout that such information is true and that you are authorized to use the payment instrument. We reserve the right to change Klout’s prices at any time.”

The Sweetest Side of Marketing: Connecting with Genuine People

When I started my business in the nineties, I tried to do it the right way. I took a course, read marketing magazines, networked, knocked on doors and took every promotional option I could afford. One evening I sat in an advertising seminar and looked around at the room full of chain-smoking, drinking, overweight, stressed business people and thought, “if this is what being your own boss does to you, I don’t want to do it!” This wasn’t what doing what you loved looked like. It just couldn’t be.

Despite those reservations, I am still working for myself. As far as advertising goes, the Internet has changed the game dramatically. The one thing, which hasn’t changed, is that the stress of “have to” marketing puts me off. For example, being used in author blog hops that give me no reciprocal promotion, fighting battles with greedy book distributors, dodging hit and run marketing on social media, battling to be seen, avoiding spam and playing the follower numbers game. It leaves me cold. There is little genuineness in marketing. I often tune out to it, block it and don’t trust it... but I must do it. At times I feel like a hypocrite

You know what has saved me from throwing in the towel? The real friends I have made by having the courage to put myself out there. If I had never gotten over my hate of Twitter, dived into Facebook, tried ROW80 or started my blog, I would not have come across inspiring people, new ideas, challenges that made me grow, or the exciting opportunities I have thrived on. I am a people person, so there is where I focus: on making connections with other real people.

Getting my profile out there is essential. Fears of rejection and criticism have to be looked in the eye, and self-doubts cast aside. Believing in yourself can be your biggest marketing battle, but it’s worth overcoming your hurdles to find the people and places out there that make it all worthwhile. It’s about more than selling and bank account balances. It is all about the serendipitous discoveries of the creative journey, and the best people to go on your quest with. Go find them!

About the Author

Cate Russell-Cole is a qualified Creativity Coach and Social Worker. She has a love of the science fiction - fantasy genre and has been writing diaries, appalling poetry and short stories since she was a child. Cate lives in Brisbane, Australia with her husband and two cats and habitually writes everything in Australian English.

Over her career, she has researched, written and taught five creativity-orientated courses; worked as a freelance writer, graphic designer, desktop publisher and has authored ten non-fiction books. Privately, she is a Christian science fiction/ fantasy author who is working on The Chronicles of Mirchar Series, plus a non-fiction study guide on the life of King David.

Publications by Cate Russell-Cole

- Write Your Life Story E-Course
- Unleashing Your Creative Spirit
- Prayer Journal Workshop
- Creating and Resolving Conflict in Fiction (Four Dimensional Characterisation Series)
- Building Emotionally Realistic Characters (Four Dimensional Characterisation Series)
- Phoenix Rising: Conquering the Stresses of the Writer's Life
- Phoenix Thriving: Conquering Stress and Burnout in the Blogging Life
- Savvy Blogging for Time Starved Writers
- Avoiding Back Pain: A Simple Guide
- Maintaining Your Independence, A Course For Seniors
- Person To Person: A Layman's Course in Communication Skills
- The Chronicles of Mirchar: The Dragon Tree
- The Chronicles of Mirchar: The Memory Library
- The King David Study Guide